



General Assembly

Distr.: General
22 October 2024

Original: English

Seventy-ninth session
Fifth Committee
Agenda item 140
Programme planning

Letter dated 22 October 2024 from the Chair of the First Committee addressed to the Chair of the Fifth Committee

In its resolution [78/244](#), the General Assembly reiterated that whenever the Committee for Programme and Coordination could not provide conclusions and recommendations on a given subprogramme or programme of the proposed programme budget, the plenary or the relevant Main Committee or Main Committees of the General Assembly responsible for those mandates would consider the said subprogramme or programme at the very start of its session in order to provide any conclusions and recommendations to the Fifth Committee, at the earliest opportunity, and no later than four weeks after the start of the session, for timely consideration by the Fifth Committee.

In the report of the Committee for Programme of Coordination on its sixty-fourth session, held from 13 May to 14 June 2024 ([A/79/16](#)), the Committee recommended, in line with General Assembly resolution [78/244](#), that the Assembly, at its seventy-ninth session, consider the programme plan for programme 3, Disarmament, of the proposed programme budget for 2025, under the agenda item entitled “Programme planning”.

Accordingly, the First Committee, at its eleventh plenary meeting convened on 17 October 2024, held a debate on working methods of the First Committee and programme planning and considered the programme plan for programme 3, Disarmament, of the proposed programme budget for 2025. I enclose herewith a summary of the debate for timely consideration by the Fifth Committee (see annex).

(Signed) Maritza Chan Valverde
Chair
First Committee



Annex

Summary of the Chair

1. On 17 October 2024, in accordance with General Assembly resolution [78/244](#) and its adopted programme of work and timetable for its seventy-ninth session (A/C.1/79/CRP.1), the First Committee, at its eleventh meeting, held a debate on working methods of the First Committee and programme planning.

2. The Chair of the of the First Committee at its seventy-ninth session, the Permanent Representative of Costa Rica, Maritza Chan Valverde, opened the meeting, inviting interventions from States on the topics at hand. To support delegations in their discussions on working methods, the Chair circulated a non-paper prior to the meeting containing suggested guiding questions on matters such as time management, transparency and informal consultations, the participation of civil society, inclusion and gender parity, and the possibility of biennialization or triennialization of resolutions.

3. Delegations expressed appreciation to the Chair for convening a meeting dedicated to a discussion of the working methods of the First Committee and to programme planning, also thanking her for her preparation of the non-paper. At the outset of the meeting, the Chair informed the First Committee of her intention to prepare a summary of the discussion, under her own responsibility, for onward transmittal to the Chair of the Fifth Committee and to the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly for further consideration. The present summary is submitted pursuant to that announcement.

4. At the eleventh meeting, in line with the decision taken at its organizational session, the First Committee took action on the draft decision on information on requests for votes (A/C.1/79/L.4), adopting it without a vote. The Committee subsequently adopted an oral decision to apply the modalities of the decision to the seventy-ninth session. The Chair announced that, in implementing the modalities of the decision at that session, she would provide information on requests for vote from the podium. In introducing the draft decision, also on behalf of the delegation of South Africa, Singapore recalled the existing practice of the First Committee of maintaining the anonymity of the State or States requesting votes on draft proposals and/or individual paragraphs. The co-sponsors of the draft decision noted that the intention was not to infringe on the right of any State to request a vote, but rather to enhance transparency.

5. At the same meeting, the Committee heard interventions from 19 States, 4 of which spoke on behalf of a group of States. Some of the interventions served as explanations of vote on the draft decision actioned at the meeting.

6. With regard to programme planning, regret was expressed that the Committee for Programme and Coordination had once again been unable to reach consensus on conclusions and recommendations on programme 3, Disarmament, of the proposed programme plan for 2025 as contained in section A of [A/79/6 \(Sect. 4\)](#). The view was expressed that programme planning should remain depoliticized. A group of States emphasized that programme planning was and should remain a consensus-based exercise and that the Fifth Committee had the final responsibility to adopt the programme plan and budget. One delegation cautioned that the meeting on 17 October was a duplication of the work of the Fifth Committee, stating that it would have preferred that the First Committee not be called upon to address the matter. A group of States requested the Chair to propose to the Fifth Committee that the proposed programme plan be adopted by the General Assembly without modification.

7. One delegation took note of the report of the Committee for Programme of Coordination on its sixty-fourth session, held from 13 May to 14 June 2024 (A/79/16), acknowledging the importance of ensuring the resources needed by the Secretariat to implement mandates emanating from the General Assembly. Another delegation emphasized the key role played by the Committee while also expressing regret that it had not reached agreement on the respective programme for several years in a row. Noting that not reaching agreement should not become the norm, the delegation called for strengthening the Committee to fulfil its mandate.

8. Appreciation was expressed to the Secretariat for supporting the convening of the meetings of the First Committee. One delegation expressed gratitude to the Office for Disarmament Affairs for its support for the implementation of decisions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, underscoring that such assistance must be impartial, depoliticized and carried out in strict accordance with mandates provided by Member States.

9. Some delegations expressed gratitude to the Office for Disarmament Affairs for particular areas of work, including work related to the review process of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the Conference on the Establishment of a Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction, the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. One delegation appreciated the documents database established by the Office for Disarmament Affairs. A group of States called for accelerated efforts to implement the decision to establish a fellowship programme on small arms and light weapons control.

10. The matter of working methods of the First Committee was addressed by several delegations in detail, including through response to the guiding questions provided by the Chair in her non-paper. One delegation reflected that working methods were not one-size-fits-all and that each part of the disarmament machinery had its own specific needs. Another delegation noted the intrinsic relationship between the different components of the machinery and stated that coordination should be strengthened and improved.

11. Some delegations called for a more comprehensive consideration of the working methods of the First Committee, beyond information provided on the requests for votes. One delegation welcomed the time devoted to that discussion with a view to translating recommendations into practical adjustments in the Committee, suggesting the compilation of a list of proposals for the further consideration of States. Another delegation suggested that an informal platform on methods of work and the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the Committee be launched. That delegation noted that such an informal undertaking could be carried out under the auspices of the consecutive Chairs of the Committee supported by a configuration of supporting States, open to all Member States and with active contributions from and engagement by the Office for Disarmament Affairs, academia, think tanks and civil society.

12. Some delegations emphasized that meetings of the First Committee must be held in person and that the modalities adopted during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had been exceptional in nature and did not constitute any precedent. A group of States underscored that the rules of procedure of the General Assembly should continue to guide the work of the plenary and its Committees. Thus, revitalizing or streamlining the work of the Assembly should not lead to a reinterpretation of the existing mandates and rules. One delegation expressed hope that the Secretariat would support States in drafting resolutions that did not alter the procedures and functioning of the Assembly, suggesting a process of informing States of potential implications, just as the process for financial ones.

13. A few delegations noted the heavy workload of the Committee, reflecting on its five scheduled weeks and expressing openness to allocating additional meetings to the Committee. Some delegations noted the need for additional time, in particular to consider draft proposals. One delegation noted the thematic clusters could be reconsidered, in particular in the light of the growing number of proposals related to emerging technologies, which did not necessarily fit neatly under any cluster.

14. To support more efficient time management, the possibility of combining rights of reply following the general debate and thematic clusters was raised and subsequently supported by a delegation. With regard to the current limits on speaking time, one delegation called them appropriate, but noted that efforts could be made to avoid duplicative statements in the general debate and thematic discussions. A group of delegations lamented the recent trend of cutting off microphones, cautioning that it could damage the work of the Committee and must not hinder the right of States to express their views.

15. On the matter of text negotiations, a suggestion was made to shift the deadline for the submission of draft proposals to the third week of the Committee to allow more time for consultations. A group of delegations emphasized the critical importance of providing adequate space in which to conduct consultations to facilitate intergovernmental negotiations. One delegation noted the need to ensure that informal consultations did not overlap, providing as an example the clashing of virtual and in-person meetings, the former not always being reflected in the online calendar. The importance of consultations with regional groups was highlighted, with one delegation suggesting the appointment of a focal point in the Bureau to consider best practices in that regard.

16. Several delegations underscored the importance of striving for consensus on draft proposals, appealing for such efforts to be exhausted. In that context, regret was expressed regarding the growing number of votes being taken in the Committee. Many delegations reflected on the growing number of draft resolutions and decisions, with many appealing for avoidance of duplication and competition. Efforts to merge parallel processes were cited. Some delegations noted the particular difficulties faced by smaller delegations in covering duplicative processes. The view was expressed that competing and parallel processes were concerning not only from a resource perspective but also because they resulted in greater polarization. The possibility of biennialization or triennialization of resolutions was raised by several delegations, in particular with regard to static resolutions adopted annually. One delegation noted that that approach could be useful, but only if there was a sense of unity of purpose and burden-sharing. Another delegation, noting that it did not seek to restrict the right of States to introduce proposals, welcomed the idea that States could assess which resolutions would benefit from running on a longer cycle or could be introduced on a single occasion.

17. With regard to the participation of civil society, several delegations welcomed the participation of academia and other experts to enrich Committee discussions. One delegation noted the importance of safeguarding the access of civil society, and another noted that the participation of such entities supported greater transparency. Some delegations supported the formal participation of civil society and called for the dedicated segment for such interventions to be webcast. Other delegations emphasized the intergovernmental nature of the Committee supporting civil society engagement to remain informal. In the same vein, the view was expressed that the participation of civil society should always be predicated on respect for the Committee as an intergovernmental body. Several delegations noted the importance of ensuring the full and equal participation of women in the Committee's work, while others noted the value of gender mainstreaming.

18. Other matters relating to working methods of the Committee were raised, including the critical importance of the principle of multilingualism and the necessity of interpretation in all official languages of the United Nations during all official meetings. The significance of dissemination of official documents in all official languages was also noted. Delegations also noted the fundamental principle of equal participation of all States, noting the crucial importance of the timely issuance of visas to all members of delegations. In that context, one delegation emphasized the importance of ensuring the provision of interpretation and optimizing the website and the e-deleGATE platform. One delegation reiterated its request that the Secretariat provide a report on its efforts to resolve the matter of outstanding visas for members of its delegation.

19. The Chair of the First Committee expressed appreciation to delegations for their engagement in the discussions and reiterated her intention to prepare a summary for onward transmittal to the Fifth Committee for further consideration.
